

Executive Update



Helping People Help the Land

A special update for Idaho conservation leaders ♦ Summer 2006

Special Feature

NRCS Working to Conserve the Heritage of Native Plants

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Reintroducing Camas

Every year, members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe at Fort Hall travel to the Camas Prairie near Fairfield to dig camas bulbs.

"Many of the tribal elders remember digging it here [Fort Hall] as kids," says **Kurt Cates**, NRCS district conservationist in Fort Hall. "But it's not here now."

The camas plant boasts purple flowers and a small edible bulb. Considered very nutritious, the tribal members have traditionally pit-roasted the bulbs or dried them for use in soups and stews.

"As a Tribe, we're trying to reintroduce camas to its traditional native areas," Cates says.

Last year, the NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Corvallis, Ore., sent bulbs. Tribal members, along with students from the Sho-Ban School, planted them. Cooperative Extension provided additional seed.

Fort Hall District Conservationist Kurt Cates helps with a fire pit for roasting the collected bulbs while other tribal members look on.



The tribes also dry camas bulbs for use in soups and stews.

However, tribal members were disappointed to see that none of the plants came up this spring.

"But we're not giving up," Cates says.

As part of their annual trek to the Camas Prairie this spring, tribal members brought a new round of camas bulbs back to plant.

"We're also going to get some camas from the Island Park area and plant it in the mountainous areas of the reservation," Cates says.

Aberdeen PMC Releasing More Native Plants

The Aberdeen Plant Materials Center (PMC) wants to add another native plant to its list of releases.

The PMC is locating stands of sulphurflower buckwheat for seed collection this summer.

"Sulphurflower buckwheat is important to sage grouse," says **Dan Ogle**, NRCS plant materials specialist in Boise. "Like a lot of forbs, the plant is a definite source of insects which, in turn, provides food for sage grouse chicks."

Since the Aberdeen PMC has already grown sulphurflower buck-

wheat for the Craters of the Moon National Park, they knew they could be successful in making a release.

To find the best selection for the Intermountain West, the PMC will plant seeds from many collections this fall and then choose the most promising three-to-five seed sources. Those, in turn, will be evaluated for the final release.

Ogle says sulphurflower buckwheat will compliment the PMC's plant releases, many of them native and culturally significant plants. Releases include Richfield selection



Sulphurflower buckwheat growing at the Craters of the Moon National Park.

firecracker penstemon and Northern Cold Desert selection winterfat.

"We have a good selection of grasses and shrubs available," he says. "Now we're working on forbs to complete our recommended native plant community seeding mixtures."

Conservationist's Corner



Richard Sims
State Conservationist
Idaho NRCS

When is it Time to Change?

Many of us have watched Ada County grow by leaps and bounds over the past several years. As the urban corridor has expanded, the agricultural base has diminished.

Suprisingly, with this change from agriculture to urban, the primary resource concerns have not changed. They just come from different sources. Ada County will continue to be challenged with water quality, air quality and nutrient management in the coming years.

More than ever, sound conservation assistance will be needed to address these issues as the population continues to grow (expected to reach 1 million people over the next ten years) and there is greater demand on the county's natural resources.

It is important Idaho NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to the new customer base in Ada County. These customers include units of government, small acreage owners and urbanites willing to do "backyard conservation."

Effective Oct. 2006, the Meridian NRCS office will shift their attention to urban resource issues in Ada County. The Caldwell NRCS office will provide technical assistance to all agricultural producers in the area (Canyon and Ada Counties).

This will make for a dramatic change for both offices. I believe it will help our conservationists provide comprehensive customer service and help Idaho NRCS address the most pressing resource concerns of this century.

Snapshots from the Field



NRCS State Conservationist Rich Sims signs the agency MOU for the Idaho Greater Sage Grouse Plan. He was joined by Idaho Governor Jim Risch and eight other government agency directors.



"I'm so excited about what this new pivot is going to do for my cattle/haying operation. It's like a gift from heaven," says farmer Steve Murdock of Hamer. Howard Johnson, Rigby district conservationist, (right) helped Murdock switch from flood irrigation to pivot.



Rob Fredericksen, Conservation Security Program (CSP) manager, and Terril Stevenson, natural resource specialist, answer questions during the recent "Get Ready for CSP" producer workshops NRCS and the local soil conservation districts held June 20-22 in the Magic Valley.



School kids enjoy the Conservation Jeopardy game at the Idaho Falls Water Festival. The Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts, NRCS and the East/West Side Soil & Water Conservation Districts partnered to bring a booth and the game to the Festival.



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